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Critics, while generally praising George Eliot's Middlemarch, cannot agree on what makes the novel great. Some say the greatness of the book lies in the characterizations. Others say the novelist reveals her central genius in aesthetic unity. My thesis, however, is that the real secret of her genius in Middlemarch is her use, as a philosophical and psychological novelist, of great scenes of confrontation between characters upon whom the gradual action of ordinary causes comes to bear, producing intense drama.

First, I examine what some critics have said pertinent to my thesis and follow this with an assessment of what George Eliot has said about dramatic writing. Then I assess the woman herself and the confrontations in her own life from which she could have drawn knowledge for creation of her powerful dramatic scenes. Against this background of information, I explicate eight major confrontation scenes, showing some techniques she employed, including the pyramiding of scenes or building of dramatic tension scene-upon-scene, the depiction of the effects of gradual action of ordinary causes upon

the lives of all the characters through their inter-relationships, the use of irony, peripety, myth, contrast between movement and stasis of characters, the choice of names, the application of ego motives, the use of shifting points of view, the depiction of tragic figures and the use of philosophical themes and understatement.

The ultimate conclusion is that George Eliot applies these techniques to produce scenes of great drama, drawing realistically upon life and representing people to be no better or no worse than they are, with tolerance and sympathy--all humanistically intended to broaden the moral comprehension of the readers.

CONFRONTATION SCENES

IN MIDDLEMARCH

by

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Since George Eliot's Middlemarch appeared in eight half-volumes in 1871 and 1872, critics have agreed generally that it is a great novel; but the question most of them seem unable to answer satisfactorily is: what makes the book great?¹

Is it aesthetic unity? Some nineteenth-century critics, with Henry James foremost among them, have said that Middlemarch is not strongly unified, that it is, in fact, four, perhaps five separate stories.² Yet there are other critics who agree that Middlemarch is well unified;³ indeed, some suggest that the novel, carefully planned chapter-by-chapter as the author's records show it to have been, is over-unified, too tightly knit.⁴ They suggest that the kinship of characters in interrelated events is so intricate and convenient to plot development at times that it seems almost a technique of deus ex machina.⁵

If the critics cannot agree that unity is the reason for the greatness of Middlemarch, could it be characterization? Victorian critics were lavish in praise of the novelist's depth of perception into human nature in Middlemarch. Barbara Hardy, however, says modern critics place more emphasis

on aesthetic unity than on characterization, though most of them admire George Eliot's technique with characters.⁶ The critics, therefore, are unable to agree that characterization is the proof of the novelist's genius in this book.

George Eliot has been praised for her philosophical perspective, for her extraordinary skill in narration, for her use of imagery, of shifting point of view, of description and of other literary devices. There are critics who suggest that she presented the novel as an allegory on self-knowledge.⁷ But nowhere among the critics has the real, central greatness of George Eliot's fiction been clearly established and explicated. Henry James, who admired the novelist's work though challenging some aspects of it, suggests that the central power of her genius is too elusive to explicate. He points out that nothing in her letters or journals really explains the secret of her success. James thinks she was too modest ever to presume to dictate any formula for writing. Her process, he says, "remains inscrutable and mysterious."⁸

George Eliot did, however, record some comments on what she was trying to do in her novel. In replying to criticism of her publisher, John Blackwood, that the manuscript lacked unity, she said she wished to show the gradual action of ordinary causes. This comment, and others she made on literary matters which will be examined later, hints

at the source of her writing genius but does not identify it. I am unable to find that she recorded anywhere an explanation of her method, a description of any specific procedure which adequately explains how she undertook to achieve her goals in writing fiction.

It is my purpose to show that neither unity, nor character development, nor any other of George Eliot's accomplishments that we have mentioned, are the real explanation for her exceptional achievement in Middlemarch. Of course, unity and character development are major components of the strength or weakness of a novel. George Eliot is master of both, as well as of other literary skills. But the real secret of her genius, as we shall see, is her use of great scenes of dramatic confrontation between characters upon whom the gradual action of ordinary causes comes to bear. For the novelist, a confrontation scene is a specific medium by which she is able to demonstrate great dramatic power.

From ordinary events, from what George Eliot terms "the gradual action of ordinary causes," emerge in Middlemarch the characters who confront one another in shattering moments of decision. The novelist builds to these confrontations with a sweeping narrative which reveals a finely-woven plot, a series of stories carefully related and integrated, in which

her characters are developed through her mastery of psychological penetration. The critical motive of all her characters, we shall see, is egoism, spurring a basic conflict between the characters' selfish interests and the demands or needs of the world around them.⁹ The novelist ingeniously weaves together the lives of her characters, bringing them ultimately into confrontations of instinctive concern to us all. We listen, watch and involve ourselves in these scenes, passing judgment upon their realism, their trueness to the lives of the characters the novelist creates.

It is my intention here to explore the intricacies of some major confrontation scenes in Middlemarch, to try to show just what literary devices George Eliot uses in these scenes and the background against which they are set, because these scenes evoke the intense involvement which brings her so closely in communion with her readers, and, I suspect, ultimately with herself. First, however, let us consider three factors relevant to such an exploration. I will examine what critics have said pertinent to my thesis and follow this with an assessment of what George Eliot has said about dramatic writing. Then, I will assess the woman herself and the confrontations in her life from which she could have drawn knowledge for the creation of her powerful dramatic scenes.

I find no record that any critic emphasizes the confrontations in Middlemarch and declares: here is where and how

George Eliot proves her genius. Though there are critics who hint at this, none explore it. Mark Schorer writes of Middlemarch that "It is through the great scenes of the book... where the plot gradually closes down on the characters, that the book derives its real movement and life."¹⁰ But he goes no further with the idea; he does not explore it. Sidney Colvin, reviewing the book not long after it appeared, writes, "It contains some of the most moving dramatic scenes in our literature."¹¹ Even George Saintsbury, who discounted George Eliot as a major writer in 1895, concedes that in "scattered and separate scenes... she always excelled."¹² V. S. Pritchett, writing in 1947, says, "The great scenes of Middlemarch are exquisite, living transpositions of real moral dilemmas."¹³

One of the most careful students of Middlemarch, Jerome Beaty, points out that George Eliot's "Quarry" plans for Book Six of the novel reveal for the first time "something like a method in the development of the novel..." The method, he says, was to make lists of major situations and happenings and to group them to approximate one part of the book. "The major events began to take on the form of dramatic scenes...", he says. He continues that "any

number of novelists would have been capable of conceiving even the most advanced and detailed plans of the notebook," but "only George Eliot from these notes could have written Middlemarch."¹⁴ Having sensed the proximity of the novelist's secret for success, Beaty leaves the mystery there. One feels that, like James, Beaty concludes that her genius remains inscrutable and mysterious.

Another critic, Quentin Anderson, also hints about the real secret of the success of Middlemarch when he says that "the matter of the book is peoples' opinions about one another, and its particular method consists in contriving scenes in which the disparity between the intentions of the agents and the opinions of the observers is dramatically exhibited."¹⁵ While Anderson accords special values to the dramatic scenes in Middlemarch, he does not explicate the scenes to show what the novelist has done in them. The matter of the book is what these divergent people, trapped in the conflict between egoism and their idealism, will do when they are brought into confrontations with themselves and others. In these moments of truth, reality is achieved, or perhaps something realer than reality, in the sense that what happens in the scenes has meaning, has universality, to almost any reader.¹⁶

The reader immediately identifies with the characters, and the communication between George Eliot and her reader is momentarily perfect. What the reader sees is the development of characters suffering from some personal delusion, who are less than they purport to be, and who dread the time when others will discover the truth about them. It all suggests the myth of original sin, and each reader who shares these moments of discovery, of confrontation between these flawed human beings, must experience pity and fear, in Aristotelian fashion, for the reflection there of himself.¹⁷ George Eliot expresses pity for these beings. The reader feels pity for them. Through these scenes of intellectual and emotional encounter, the novelist and the reader experience a fleeting moment of communion. George Eliot acknowledges that this communication was her reason for being as an artist. In a letter to Charles Ritter, Feb. 11, 1873, she says, "What one's soul thirsts for is the word which is the reflection of one's own aim and delight in writing-- the word which shows that what one meant has been perfectly seized, that the emotion which stirred one in writing has been repeated in the mind of the reader."¹⁸

In another letter, she writes, "If art does not enlarge man's sympathies, it does nothing morally... The only effect I ardently long to produce in my writings is

that those who read them should be better able to imagine and feel the pains and joys of those whose differ from themselves in everything but the broad fact of being struggling human beings."¹⁹ George Eliot, who had said in her journal at the start of her career as a novelist that the highest quality of fiction is dramatic presentation, reflects this again in the Westminster Review (January, 1856) in finding things to praise about Browning's Men and Women. There, she emphasizes the fact that his "keen glance pierces into all the secrets of human nature," but, she stresses, "he reveals these secrets, not by a process of dissection, but by dramatic painting..." (page 183). In commenting on Ruskin's views on realism in Modern Painters, she makes a point about drama by quoting Ruskin: "To invent a story, or admirably and thoroughly tell any part of a story, it is necessary to grasp the entire mind of every personage concerned in it, and know precisely how they would be affected by what happens...." She emphasizes his observation that a few sentences spoken "across a supper table" are infinitely more profound in literature than "passionate melodies of the self-examining verse."²⁰

An important fact to understand is that it is not how extensively George Eliot uses dialogue, but how effectively,

that counts. As we shall see, to achieve intense dramatic scenes, she explores her characters profoundly, carefully probing their minds for motives, and searching externally for influences. In the Westminster Review (July, 1856), writing of the Natural History of German Life by W. H. Riehl, she discusses "picture writing of the mind," placing emphasis on realism again. "Art is the nearest thing to life," she says. "It is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow men beyond the bounds of our personal lot."²¹ She says the writer need not know what motives and influences should act upon human beings, but what the motives and influences are that do act upon them. To this end, she says, the writer must have a real knowledge of people, make a thorough study of their habits, their ideas, their motives.

It is significant that George Eliot drew heavily upon ancient literature and especially upon Sophocles, for her knowledge of drama. Sophocles, she says, influenced her most by his "delineation of the great primitive emotions" (p.195).²² Her sense of drama in writing also was enhanced by thorough, repeated reading of Aristotle's Poetics, where tragedy, acknowledged as the highest form of drama, is most aptly defined.²³

Her skill in techniques of drama shows clearly in the confrontations in Middlemarch between characters in conflicts, between egoistic desires and idealism, between selfishness and renunciation.

CHAPTER II
BIOGRAPHICAL SOURCES FOR MIDDLEMARCH

Gordon S. Haight shows us evidence throughout his biography of George Eliot that the conflict between ego and idealism was as central to her own life as it is in the conflicts in Middlemarch. In evaluating the impact of her personal experiences upon her writing of Middlemarch, it is of secondary importance whether she recreated specific people and scenes from confrontations in her life. It is of no great moment that Robert Herbert Brabant, the elderly physician with whom the author apparently had an affair in her early twenties, was or was not the pattern for Mr. Casaubon (p.50), or whether Celia in Middlemarch bore a resemblance to the author's beloved sister, Chrissey (p.10) or whether Herbert Spencer was Sir Chettam (p.117). No great importance derives either from whether parallels may be drawn between specific events in the author's life and in Middlemarch.

The real significance of the relationship between the personal confrontations of George Eliot and Middlemarch comes through her vast knowledge of life, her acute comprehension of human motives, gained in her personal encounters, through the wisdom, the growing self-knowledge, the increasing sense of her own fallibility and the fallibility

of all mankind. All of this crystalizes into an interest in humanistic values and a tolerance which we expect to find, and do find, in all the most profound scenes of Middlemarch. It is no surprise to those who know of George Eliot's personal conflicts to find that she can write with such profound comprehension of love, despair and death, and that she can realistically create scenes where egoism and idealism become locked in giant struggles. Her own life had taught her these things. The characters and events in Middlemarch undoubtedly are fusions of numerous people and events drawn from George Eliot's personal experience, and intensified by her sensitive imagination, rather than being fictionalized copies of specific people and specific events.

The novelist was, from the start, a highly intelligent person, shy, sensitive and ugly, easily reduced to tears (pp.8, 30).²⁴ Her lifelong diffidence failed to veil her colossal ego. In fact, it accentuated it. There are countless examples of this diffidence, her self-deprecation, her despondency.²⁵ She writes her dear friend, Cara Bray, in June, 1854, "My troubles are purely psychological--self-dissatisfaction and despair of achieving anything worth the doing" (p. 144). She writes Cara in September, 1855, "how deficient I have been in almost every relation of my life" (p. 191). She notes in her journal in June, 1861, a "despondency that comes from too egoistic a dread of failure" (p. 348). That egoistic dread stayed with her.

Lewes sensed deep in George Eliot's nature a "crying need to be recognized, respected, admired, which is reflected in several anecdotes of her childhood" (p. 392). She waged within herself a lifelong battle between egoistic motives and an inclination toward idealistic renunciation of self, a battle which manifested itself in many ways. Just before her father died in June, 1849, George Eliot, then 29, wrote, "what shall I be without my father? It will seem as if part of my moral nature were gone. I had a horrid vision of myself last night becoming earthly sensual and devilish for want of that restraining influence" (p.67). Her intimacies with a number of men in her life revealed how real this moral conflict was. Her ego clearly was a compelling force in her need to be wanted. It cannot be a surprise that the conflict of morality and ego is treated with such genius in Middlemarch.

George Eliot's life presents one of the most remarkable instances of a person professing to seek anonymity, yet crying out for recognition, for identity.²⁶ Her search for identity seems to have been extremely complex. It is reflected in her experimentation with names. She variously chooses to be Mary Anne Evans, Mary Ann Evans, Marian Evans, Polly, George Eliot, Marian Evans Lewes, Mary Ann Evans again when Lewes dies, and finally Mary Ann Cross.

Ironically, this woman, who so much wanted recognition, apparently published work using her own name only once.

Haight says this occurred in July, 1854, when she published a translation of Ludwig Feuerbach's Das Wesen des Christenthums. This book bore the name Marian Evans. Other than this, she used her pseudonym or was simply a silent, anonymous collaborator. It is interesting to speculate on the comments advanced by Edward Dowden that the tragic aspect of life, as viewed by George Eliot, derives from "the titantic strife of egoistic desires with duties which the conscience confesses, and those emotions which transcend the interests of the individual. It seems to her no small or easy thing to cast away self. Rather the casting self away is an agony and a martyrdom."²⁷ Indeed, this could explain her path of anonymity-- an overwhelming of her ego even as it cried out for recognition, a striving for idealism through self-renunciation. Certainly, this is a prime theme in Middlemarch.

To see how George Eliot's conflicts of ego carry over into Middlemarch, let us look briefly at some examples. In a reconciliation scene between Dorothea and Casaubon, the novelist observes of him, "There is a sort of jealousy which needs very little fire: it is hardly a passion, but a blight bred in the cloudy damp despondency of egoism" (p.156).²⁸ Applying what the novelist terms a parable to

Rosamond Vincy, she explains of scratches on a surface reflecting candle light, "The scratches are events, and the candle is the egoism of any person... of Miss Vincy, for example." George Eliot provides: "It is demonstrable that the scratches are going everywhere impartially, and it is only your candle which produces the flattering illusion of a concentric arrangement" (p. 195). Again of Casaubon, the novelist observes that a tiny speck very close to our vision "will blot out the glory of the world." And she adds, "I know no speck as troublesome as self" (p. 307). Making a psychological exploration of Lydgate and his failure to feel compassion for Casaubon, the novelist comments: "He was at present too ill acquainted with disaster to enter into the pathos of a lot where everything is below the level of tragedy except the passionate desire of the sufferer" (p. 310).

Of the relationship between Rosamond and Ladislav, the novelist observes that Rosamond was not upset because she loved him and was losing him to Dorothea, but that "She was oppressed by ennui, and by that dissatisfaction which in women's minds is continually turning into a trivial jealousy, referring to no real claim, springing from no deeper passion than the vague exactness of egoism, and yet capable of im-

elling action as well as speech" (p. 439).

Probing Bulstrode's personality, George Eliot says, "But his fears were such as belong to a man who cares to maintain his recognized supremacy: the loss of high consideration from his wife, as from everyone else who did not clearly hate him out of enmity to the truth, would be as the beginning of death for him" (p. 449). She expands this observation on Bulstrode to apply to all people: "Who can know how much of his inward life is made up of the thoughts he believes other men to have about him, until that fabric of opinion is threatened with ruin?" (p. 504). Implicit in this idea is the fact that man's egotistic motives are in conflict with the mores of the world, forcing him to make excruciating decisions. Consequently, we must watch in Middlemarch scenes for the use of the psychological approach, the perspective of the ego motive, to understand most fully how George Eliot achieves her purpose.

Let us look now at some of the personal confrontations in the novelist's life. As she began writing Middlemarch in 1869, she was fifty years old, and she had been living with Lewes for fifteen years. Over the years she had lost in death her mother, father, a sister and brother. She had

renounced Christianity and had been hurt in several love affairs. Behind her were notable literary achievements, including Scenes of Clerical Life, Adam Bede, The Mill on the Floss, Silas Marner, Romola, Felix Holt, and The Spanish Gypsy. After Middlemarch two books lay ahead of her before her death in 1880: Daniel Deronda and Impressions of Theophrastus Such. She had traveled frequently and widely on the Continent, mingled with literary giants, and her works had achieved fame; yet she remained ostracized by society, especially by women (Biography, p.409). Ostensibly, George Eliot had renounced society, too. The major confrontations in her life had been many, and more were ahead.

At the time she began writing Middlemarch, a turbulent episode occurred. Lewes' son, Thornie, for whom the childless novelist had developed a great maternal affection, died. During the months of his illness, she attended him and sat by his bedside, witnessing his slow death. During that period, her letters to friends revealed that she suffered bitterly. She writes Harriet Beecher Stowe some two months after his death, "Death had never come near me through the twenty years since I lost my father, and this parting has entered deeply into me."²⁹ In another letter, immediately after her fiftieth birthday in November, 1869, she says, "I

have a deep sense of change within" (Biography, p. 422).

Thornie's death recalled the death of her father in 1849, one of the great personal losses of the novelist's life. She had attended her father in the same manner and had been with him at the time of his death. In both of these crises, George Eliot met the ordeals with despair and fled to a hiding place to recover. In two other encounters involving loved ones and death, the novelist acted differently. She did not attend the funerals of her sister, Chrissey, nor of Lewes. George Eliot once said she found the greatest happiness in her life with Chrissey, but Chrissey joined others of the Evans family in refusing to see her after she began living with Lewes. Therefore, as Chrissey lay dying, she did not ask George Eliot, then thirty-nine years old, to come, and the novelist did not go.³⁰ Perhaps the impact of this experience upon the novelist's life is indicated by the fact that she left the pages of her journal altogether blank for days after learning of Chrissey's death. When Lewes died in 1878, the novelist shut herself up in her room. She remained secluded for an extended period, writing and recovering.

Perhaps the most singular confrontation of all in the life of George Eliot was on that day in July, 1854,

when she took a hansom cab to St. Katherine's Wharf and met Lewes aboard a steamer to join her life with his, though he was not divorced. Haight says that "For months she had been tortured by scruples, fought fiercely against an overmastering inclination, hesitated, refusing," in her own words "to begin any future with a deliberate consent to what ought not to have been" (Biography, p. 148). When she decided to go, she well comprehended its implications. She expected that it would mean rejection not only by society in general and friends in particular but, most importantly by her own family. She did not have the courage immediately to tell them. Long after her family rejected her, she told a friend, "I cling strongly to kith and kin even though they reject me" (Biography, p. 395). She did not hear from Chrissey again until Chrissey was dying in 1859. Her brother, Isaac, kept silent for twenty-three years until she married John Walter Cross when she was sixty years old.

There were, of course, other profound personal encounters in George Eliot's life. One can only guess at what the impact was upon her when, at the age of five, she was packed off from home to live in a boarding school because her mother was ill. The two apparently were never very close. George Eliot was sixteen years old and moved quickly into the opening left to care for her father who, she wrote,

was "the one deep strong love I have ever known" (Biography, p. 21). Her break with the church when she was twenty-two years old, after a period of intense evangelicalism had passed, alienated her father in a critical confrontation. Isaac came to her assistance when her father wanted to send her away. In this agonizing situation, she compromised and agreed to attend church again with her father but would not otherwise participate from then on.

Clearly, the conflicts of personal desires and morality in the life of George Eliot eminently prepared her to portray with great understanding such Middlemarch characters as Dorothea Brooke, who aspired inadequately to self-renunciation for the good of mankind; as Fred Vincy, who truly loved Mary Garth but yielded to selfish desires which brought her and her family pain; Bulstrode, a character torn between overwhelming selfishness and the desire to be a good man; or well-meaning Will Ladislav, who coveted a married woman.

Through her own internal conflicts of ego and idealism, George Eliot acquired understanding for human beings which permeates Middlemarch. For example, her understanding for Ladislav's extra-marital involvement with both Dorothea and Rosamond could have been drawn from her own conflict between sensualism and what she called "purifying

influence," which precipitated her into a number of abortive love affairs. There was Brabant, whose family asked her to leave their home because of her familiarities with him when she was twenty-four years old. Haight says she returned home "somewhat wiser about human nature" (Biography, p.50).

There is reason to believe she learned more about life from Francoise D'Albert Durade, a friend in Geneva, and from John Chapman, for whom she became "ghost" editor for the Westminster Review. She faced Chapman in a profound encounter in which he had to tell her he loved two other women at least equally as well as her. She went away crushed but came back to work for him later in a platonic relationship, demonstrating a kind of idealistic Dorothea-like self-renunciation for art. She was deeply hurt in love, too, by Herbert Spencer, whom she met about three years before she eloped with Lewes.

Most of George Eliot's personal encounters I have discussed here occurred before she completed writing Middlemarch. If one can comprehend the giant force of George Eliot's ego, then the monumental suffering she must have experienced becomes apparent. Her own trials, her own errors, coupled with her intellectual power, helped the novelist to formulate great sympathy for the suffering, struggling people in life, and a vast tolerance for their weakness.

Herbert Spencer said George Eliot "was so tolerant of human weakness as to be quickly forgiving; and, indeed, was prone to deprecate harsh judgments. This last trait was, I doubt not, in part caused by constant study of her own defects" (Biography, p. 119). It becomes clear how she is able to portray so realistically the suffering of characters in Middlemarch.

George Eliot wrote to Charles Bray in 1855, "If the discipline of years has taught me anything it has taught me to be reverent to all good in others and perpetually mindful of my own need of tolerance" (Biography, p. 181).³¹ Out of this comes George Eliot's concept of what a novelist should do, "My artistic bent is not at all to the presentation of eminently irreproachable characters, but to the presentation of mixed human beings in such a way as to call forth judgment, pity and sympathy" (Biography, p. 222). This concept is integral to the mode of her writing in Middlemarch, a novel about human beings of mixed moral character suffering the consequences of their weaknesses.

In George Eliot's splendid scenes of confrontation her readers are made to see the wisdom of her sympathy for these fallen creatures and to share her feelings for them. This treatment, her philosophical perspective, is one of the most important attributes of the scenes in Middlemarch. Quentin Anderson, perhaps correctly, suggests that Middlemarch and

other novels by George Eliot are attempts by her to give herself a "recognizable moral status." 32

The critical fact in relating the novelist's personal experiences to the big scenes in Middlemarch is that she clearly interpreted crises in her own life, her personal knowledge of human motives and behavior, in such a way that a principle of aesthetics evolved in her fiction. The principle is that a novelist must create fiction realistically based upon life itself, portraying characters not as they should be but as the writer knows from personal experience they are: flawed, pitiable creatures aspiring to be more than they are, entangled in a conflict between selfish desires and idealism. The principle, George Eliot reveals, involves the presentation of struggling characters in such a way as to evoke pity and sympathy. Aristotle's theory of catharsis, involving pity and fear, obviously is an influence here.

George Eliot knew from her own life the kinds of encounters which most fully reveal the true nature of human beings. With unerring perspicacity, she reveals how different characters will react in such confrontations. Her philosophical and psychological assessments of what man is, contrasted with what he aspires to be, of the sad comedy of his dreams contrasted with his shortcomings, render very powerful drama in the big scenes of Middlemarch.

In the next two chapters, I will show by analyzing eight confrontation scenes how George Eliot intensifies the drama in Middlemarch by the following devices: building up tension to each confrontation scene-by-scene, interrelationships of characters and plotting the effects of their actions upon one another, by ironies, peripety, myth, choice of names, imagery, dramatic movement, point of view, use of motifs which presage tragedy, philosophical perspective, ego motives and understatement.

To be examined are the death scene involving Peter Featherstone and Mary Garth (pp. 232-235), the scene involving Casaubon and Dorothea just before his death (pp. 309-314), Casaubon's death scene (pp. 347-354), the political speech of Mr. Brooke (pp. 364-373), the first encounter of Bulstrode and John Raffles at Middlemarch (pp. 383-389), the scene in which Bulstrode faces Harriet in disgrace (pp. 543-551), the scene in which Ladislaw faces Rosamond after Dorothea has found them in a compromising situation and leaves upset (pp. 569-572), and Dorothea's subsequent self-confrontation (pp. 574-579).

CHAPTER III

FOUR CONFRONTATION SCENES

I will first examine Featherstone's death scene. In Middlemarch, I have said, scenes build upon scenes toward confrontations between characters. Featherstone's death scene is the climax of scenes which have preceded it in which the reader learned that Fred Vincy was planning his future and his marriage to Mary Garth on the presumption that he would receive a large inheritance from his uncle, Featherstone. Other interrelationships abound. Featherstone's first wife was Fred's aunt. Another of Fred's aunts is Bulstrode's wife. Of course, Fred's sister is Rosamond. We are to learn later that Featherstone's illegitimate son is the stepson of Raffles, who is to be such an integral figure in Bulstrode's life and the lives of those close to him. Therefore, we can see how these interrelationships spread widely, almost intolerably. What happens in Featherstone's death chamber, then, is to have an effect on the lives of many people, directly and indirectly, in Middlemarch.

That ordinary events and actions of people often widely affect and shape the lives of others is an important theme in George Eliot's fiction. For example, Mary Garth's decision

not to help Featherstone substitute a new will in his death scene appears to rob Fred Vincy of his inheritance and future security for both of them, though some legal authorities dispute the point. The decision also insures that the illegitimate son, Joshua Rigg, will become the owner of Featherstone's house, Stone Court. This will result in Raffles' coming to Middlemarch, with all the profound effects on the lives of the principal characters which that entails. Much of this is unknown to the reader upon encountering the death scene, though the implications for Fred and Mary are apparent. Enough is known to charge the situation with high drama and to provide the background for intensifying the drama of later scenes because of the interrelationships.

The interrelationships also involve ironies, another literary device used by the novelist to intensify the scenes of Middlemarch. One irony, indeed, one incident of peripety which we have already seen here, is that Mary's refusal to help Featherstone exchange wills apparently deprives Fred of his inheritance. The scene also builds irony for a later scene in which Bulstrode, whom Featherstone greatly disliked, becomes master of Stone Court. We learn that Bulstrode's special desire is for land and that Rigg's consuming desire is for money. Therefore, Stone Court falls into Bulstrode's hands. Fred had planned to keep Stone Court as a continuing

source of income. Death is used repeatedly in Middlemarch as a source of irony. It is also ironic that Mary Garth is the only person Featherstone really trusts, and yet it is she who thwarts him in the final moment. At the same time, she appears to be thwarting herself.

One can find in this death scene a myth of good (Mary) pitted against evil (Featherstone). We are told that Mary finds pleasure in serving the old man, that she has a generous resolution not to act mean or treacherous. Her name itself may suggest her Biblical counterpart. We are told she honors her parents and makes no unreasonable claims. All the descriptions, all the adjectives paint her as good: "never returned him a harsh word," "waited on him faithfully." Other descriptions complete the picture of virtuous womanhood: "gentle," "quietly," and so forth.

The imagery for Featherstone depicts evil: "testiness," a man "whose life is not visibly anything but a remnant of vices," "disagreeable side," "not proud of her," "not in the least anxious about his soul," "grimace," "air of deep cunning," "agitated," "aged hyena," "distorted," "hoarse rage," "sharpness" and so on.

The fire in Featherstone's death chamber serves to enforce the double imagery of evil with its glow, "red light falling on the old man," and of death, "the fire had got low." Evil is the final image associated with the fire in the scene;

for after Mary rekindles the fire, the red flames illuminate Featherstone in his bed, dead, clasping the keys to his money chest, and his left hand lying on a heap of notes and gold.

The imagery of death and rebirth are implicit in old age (Featherstone) and youth (Mary). Notice the choice of imagery for Mary: "vigorous young mind," contrasted with "aged creature," "old man," "remnant," and "bony" for Featherstone. Notice also Mary's comment, "I will not let the close of your life soil the beginning of mine."

The attributes of dramatic movement and of stasis certainly intensify this death scene. Mary is personified as stillness and quiet, contrasting with Featherstone who is highly animated. We read that Mary "could sit perfectly still, enjoying the outer stillness and the subdued light" as she attends the old man. His initial stillness is shattered when he begins "rattling his bunch of keys," and drags a tin box from under his bed. He initiates all conversation. Most of the active verbs apply to him: "not snapped," "kept," "selected," "unlocked," and so forth. He holds up a key, makes an effort to stretch, cries, props himself up, grasps his stick, lifts it and throws it. By contrast, Mary essentially is motionless. The dramatic contrast is most effective. The author's understatement in portraying Mary actually serves to make her a foil to intensify the revelation of the wicked-

ness of this old man. The theme of ego in the scene is obvious. Repeatedly, Featherstone insists on doing "as I like," that is, to keep a grip even after death on those about him. The author comments that Mary "never forgot that vision of a man wanting to do as he liked at the last."

As is usual, in George Eliot's ingenious scenes, we see the characters multi-dimensionally: as the novelist views them, as they view one another, as they view themselves, and as we view them. For example, George Eliot gives her view of Mary, saying "she might have become cynical if she had not had parents whom she honoured..." The novelist allows Mary to assess Featherstone. Mary is "secretly convinced, though she has no other grounds than her close observation of old Featherstone's nature, that in spite of his fondness for having the Vincys about him, they were as likely to be disappointed as any of the relations whom he kept at a distance." Featherstone assesses Mary's financial position as he argues for her to do what he asks: "Take the money. You'll never have the chance again." George Eliot shows us that Featherstone tends to assess everyone materialistically according to their greed. Yet, one finds a hint in his actions that, wicked as he is, he has some inclination to do a good act before he dies. He knows Fred needs money and has helped him before. Now, at his death, we find Featherstone demanding desperately, "Call the young chap. Call Fred Vincy."

Obviously, he intends to help Fred financially. Good Mary Garth must make a quick decision. She thwarts Featherstone in his attempt to show this generosity. One senses this feeble flicker of good in the evil old man. It is as George Eliot would have it. It exemplifies her belief that the best of men have weaknesses, and that there is some good in the worst of them. Therefore, one can feel pity even for Featherstone as a frustrated human being. He becomes almost a tragic figure.

We may recall George Eliot's statement that her artistic bent is not just to present irreproachable characters, but to evoke pity for all, to be reverent of all good in others. It is a philosophical approach to writing fiction and a very real proof of the genius of George Eliot in Middlemarch.³³ The approach is philosophical in the sense that it is based on practical, moral wisdom arrived at by George Eliot through investigation of the facts and principles of reality and of human nature and behavior. The approach is philosophical in the sense that it seeks to answer what man, or indeed, existence is, by a study of man's animal instincts compared with his idealistic dreams. As George Eliot explains it in the prelude to Middlemarch (p.3), the approach has to do with reconciling "self-despair with the rapturous consciousness of life beyond self." It is philosophical because any psychological probe of human motives must lead ultimately to philosophical questions about existence, if for no other reason

than enlightened man's compelling need for some hope that he may be distinguished, elevated above the level of all other animals.

What really emerges from the various facets of definition here of the philosophical approach of George Eliot is a description of humanism, which, according to accepted definition is a philosophy that rejects supernaturalism, regards man as a natural object, and asserts the essential dignity of man and his capacity to achieve self-realization through the use of reason and scientific method.

No attempt will be successful to comprehend George Eliot's genius without taking into account this philosophical approach. We shall see it applied repeatedly in the remaining confrontations to be discussed.

George Eliot was a philosophical and psychological novelist; perhaps all great novelists must be. Humanism was a religion to her. She wrote to Harriet Beecher Stowe in the year she began Middlemarch that religion for her "must express less care for personal consolation, and a more deeply-awing sense of responsibility to man, springing from sympathy with that which of all things is certainly known to us, the difficulty of the human lot" (Biography, p. 412). A letter to Cara Bray, discussing death, in 1865 may suggest what she believed her mission as a writer to be: "I feel too that these who live and suffer may sometimes have the greater blessing of being a salvation" (Biography, p. 421).³⁴ This

suggests a role like that of Saint Theresa of suffering for the good of others, of continuing to want to live and to do the best one can in the hope that what one achieves may redeem other lives. It even suggests a sort of inverted Christ myth. George Eliot's humanism implies that to suffer in life for others is a form of salvation. Christianity has the martyr die for the salvation of others.

Benjamin Jowett said at Balliol College in 1873 that George Eliot "gives the impression of great philosophical power... Her idea of existence seemed to be 'doing good for others'" (Biography, p. 465).

* * *

Let us now turn to an examination of the scene preceding Casaubon's death in which he learns from Lydgate that he may not have long to live, and I will couple this with the scene of his death. The reader knows from scenes leading up to this confrontation that Casaubon's interrelationships spread widely to the other characters and that what happens to him will affect the lives of many of the others. We know that he intends to block any union between Dorothea and Ladislav in the event of his own death. We know of Sir James Chettam's aversion to Casaubon and that, while Chettam, of course, did not wish for Casaubon's death, he would have been pleased to see Dorothea unburdened of him. There is irony, indeed peripety, in Casaubon's death. Chettam and Ladislav expect

to find Dorothea free after Casaubon's death but discover her more encumbered than ever. Dorothea and Casaubon here recall a great myth. It is the theme of self-renunciation, as in the life of Saint Theresa. We see in scene after scene in the book that this remains Dorothea's purpose. The theme becomes a part of a tragic reversal when Dorothea comes to promise Casaubon she will carry on his work but arrives too late. He is dead.

The imagery of the two scenes leading up to and describing the death of Casaubon reiterates the dark and oppressive imagery shrouding him in earlier scenes. This darkness suggests from the beginning of the book that tragedy and death are stalking Casaubon. The novelist describes him as "the black figure." He walks amid "little shadows," "the dark Yew-trees," and finds himself metaphorically on "the dark river-bank." Death is in the air. The metaphor is extended: he hears "the plash of the oncoming oar." His passions cling "low and mist-like in shady places." The sun is "low." Night is coming in the scene and in his life. The novelist contrasts Casaubon as a death figure with Lydgate, who is "conscious of an energetic frame in its prime." Lydgate sees Casaubon as a figure with signs of premature age, bent, emaciated, melancholy. Movement intensifies the drama. Casaubon, learning

from Lydgate that death will cut off his dream of completing his work, "winced perceptibly but bowed." His formal image prevails even in such a profound moment. When Lydgate leaves Casaubon, he continues "to pace the walk." Dorothea comes to him and takes his arm, but he is distant, allowing "her pliant arm to cling with difficulty against his rigid arm." Of his unresponsiveness, the novelist says that "it is in these acts called trivialities that the seeds of joy are forever wasted, until men and women look round with haggard faces at the devastation their own waste has made..."

In this incident, there is movement and stasis, both physically and psychologically. George Eliot blends the effect of imagery and movement when she has Casaubon shut himself up in his library in his misery. Casaubon is, from the outset, a shut-in human being, shut largely within himself. Through Casaubon's rejection of Dorothea during his walk, the novelist achieves double meanings. Dorothea reflects "how they walked apart so that she was obliged to survey him." In such a crisis, says the novelist, some women begin to hate. But the idealistic theme of renunciation shines through even here. Dorothea awaits Casaubon when he comes upstairs from the library. They meet in the hallway. In three lines of dialogue, the moment is completely seized: "'Dorothea!' he said, with a gentle surprise in his tone. 'Were you waiting

for me?' 'Yes, I did not like to disturb you.' 'Come, my dear, come. You are young, and need not to extend your life by watching.'" Compassion grips Dorothea. For that moment, Casaubon escapes himself to see her plight. "She put her hand in her husband's and they went along the broad corridor together."

I have said that it is not how much dialogue George Eliot uses, but how effectively she uses it. In every instance of her most outstanding scenes, the drama is most intensified by her realization and the reader's realization that very little must be spoken or can be spoken. The novelist reveals to the reader in her psychological examination of characters in great crisis that they find it exceedingly difficult at that moment to say anything that expresses themselves adequately. They are reduced to few words. One of the central aspects of great drama is the struggle of suffering human beings to express themselves. This agonizing struggle intensifies the drama. We feel the constrictions which are choking the characters. When we realize that they are trying to surmount primitive emotions, to unfold human dignity before us, we say: this is a great dramatic scene. We have seen in the scenes involving Casaubon just before his death and at the time of his death that tragic figures are involved: Casaubon, whose egotism is shattered because he knows death will leave his life's work meaningless; and

Dorothea, who has renounced herself in dedication to a man who is a failure. George Eliot asks, concerning Casaubon, "Are there many situations more sublimely tragic than the struggle of the soul with the demand to renounce a work which has been the significance of its life?"³⁵

In Casaubon's death scene, George Eliot observes that Dorothea, in weighing whether to promise to carry on his work, looks "with a healthy sense at the probabilities on which he had risked all his egoism." Against this dark figure of consuming pride, George Eliot contrasts Dorothea as a "heaven-sent angel." All of this suggests, as in Featherstone's death scene, the conflict of good and evil. The night before Casaubon dies, Dorothea lies locked in the great internal conflict between self and selflessness, whether to yield to egotistical desires or to the idealistic renunciation of her life for the work of another. She decides on renunciation too late. "The silence in her husband's ear was nevermore to be broken."

In these two scenes, again, we see the basic underlying philosophy of George Eliot that tolerance and pity must be shown toward flawed creatures. George Eliot never loses her respect for struggling humanity. We are aware of her pity for Casaubon as well as for Dorothea, especially for Casaubon. This pity leads to multi-dimensional viewpoints

on the tragic moment for Casaubon as he awaits the answer from Lydgate to his elaborate question on how long he can expect to live. "To a mind largely instructed in human destiny," George Eliot says, "hardly anything could be more interesting than the inward conflict implied." Then we get Dorothea's viewpoint of Casaubon's plight: "His present hard struggle... the lonely labor, the ambition breathing hardly under the pressure of self-distrust; the goal receding, and the heavier limbs; and how at last the sword visibly trembling above him." Dorothea clearly is well aware of the tragic moment.

We learn in the scene involving Casaubon just before his death that he does not realize Dorothea knows of his anxiety about death or "how it might be likely to cut short his labours or his life. On this point, as on all others, he shrank from pity." George Eliot employs an effective device here in revealing the developing situation from her own viewpoint and from the viewpoints of various characters. In this scene, the reader and the novelist know Dorothea surmises what transpired between Casaubon and Lydgate. Casaubon, however, is unaware that his secret is known to anyone but Lydgate. Our observation of his actions and Dorothea's actions in the light of our knowledge of his ignorance adds to the intensity of the drama. The effect is similar to the dramatic emphasis achieved in Featherstone's

death scene when, evil as he is, Featherstone shows a flicker of good in trying to leave an inheritance to Fred Vincy. He knows about that flicker but does not realize anyone else knows it, not even Mary Garth.

* * *

Dorothea's uncle, Mr. Brooke, is a much different kind of character from Casaubon, but he is a tragic figure, nonetheless. In Chapter 51, we see something of his tragic image when, as a candidate, he faces the citizens of Middlemarch. For the reader of the novel, a number of earlier scenes have been building up to this one and have revealed much about Mr. Brooke. He has tried to perform the wise role expected of a guardian when Casaubon, twice Dorothea's age, sought her hand. One senses that Mr. Brooke recognizes his inadequacies, however. For example, he becomes apologetic to Sir James Chettam and other close friends of the family after failing to prevent the betrothal and marriage. Before the political confrontation in Chapter 51, scene upon scene has revealed to the reader that Mr. Brooke is an intellectually shallow man who wants to be deep but who, at least in flashes of perspicacity, realizes that he cannot.

The interrelations in which he is involved in the novel are many. Before the political scene, the reader has learned, in fact, of Mr. Brooke's relationships with most of the major

characters of Middlemarch. We have seen some of these links already in examining other confrontations. We know the chain of connections, for example, which links Mr. Brooke with Ladislav, the Vincys, Casaubon, and even with Featherstone. George Eliot never permits the reader to lose sight of these interrelationships which allow her to show how lives affect one another through ordinary events.

There are ironies in the chapter on Mr. Brooke's political career. First, there are those ironies involving Ladislav, who is directing Mr. Brooke's campaign. Ladislav stays away from Dorothea, though Casaubon is dead. He had thought that if Casaubon were not in the way, he might have Dorothea. Now he realizes, for the first time, that it might appear he seeks Dorothea because of her wealth. This situation raises a wall between him and her. However, Mr. Brooke wants to keep him away from Dorothea because of the provision in Casaubon's will that if Dorothea should marry Ladislav, she would lose her inheritance from her husband. Ladislav does not yet know of this will; Dorothea does, however, and thinks that is why he is staying away. Thus ironies overlap. This situation is also an example, common in Middlemarch, of different points of view which allow the reader and the author, and sometimes some of the characters, to know things are not what another character believes them to be. Our knowledge, con-

trasted with that character's lack of it, adds to the dramatic intensity. There is irony, too, in the fact that while Mr. Brooke wants to keep Ladislav away from his estate, he needs him too badly in the campaign to send him away. Ladislav wants to go away but feels compelled to remain because Mr. Brooke needs him. The dramatic tensions which arise are the result of George Eliot's calculated artistry.

Further irony is found in the fact that while Mr. Brooke is a Reform candidate, he is blind to the plight of the tenants on his own estate. The novelist depicts Mr. Brooke as a pitiful, bumbling clown. Even his name betrays him, for he babbles as ineffectively as a brook. He is a candidate on the right side, the novelist says, even if his "brain and marrow" are as soft as is "consistent with a gentlemanly bearing..." The novelist describes Mr. Brooke as a man not too "clever in his intellects," who has a sense "of being a little out to sea." She says that Mr. Brooke's mind, remembering any train of thought, "would let it drop, run away in search of it, and not easily come back again." We see that his scatterbrained antics are intensified by the "demon," after two glasses of sherry. But we must understand that while George Eliot recognizes that the character type with which she is dealing is a fool, she is not ridiculing him.³⁶ Her philosophical approach of tolerance and sympathy prevails. "Pray pity him," she says.

In depicting him as a fool, George Eliot is preparing us for the moment when Mr. Brooke is to step out upon a balcony and address the citizens of Middlemarch in the street. Dramatic tension is the result. The novelist finds, also, in Mr. Brooke a little flicker of more profound intellectual depth as he confronts the crowd. While he believes that he is a political "tactician by nature," still "He was a little conscious of defeat." This scene recalls a similar flicker of intellectual depth displayed by Mr. Brooke in an earlier scene when Dorothea and Casaubon have just returned from their honeymoon. Then, Mr. Brooke observes that Casaubon appeared overtired from his research. And he adds prophetically with a flash of insight: "I overdid it once...about topography, ruins, temples... I thought I had a clue, but I saw it would carry me too far, and nothing might have come of it. You may go any length in that sort of thing, and nothing may come of it, you know." (p.203.) Another example is found in a fine scene near the end of the novel in which Mr. Brooke announces to his family and closest friends that Dorothea and Ladislav plan to marry. Mr. Brooke tells Sir James Chettam, who despises Ladislav, that "... you have not been able to hinder it any more than I have. There's something singular in things: they come round, you know."

In the political scene, the drama is further elevated by the device of contrasting Mr. Brooke's polished respectability

with the uncouthness of the crowd he addresses. Ironically, he wrongly thinks them to be his friends, his "own neighbors." He is a gentleman as he addresses them: "Gentlemen--Electors of Middlemarch." But they are not gentlemen, and they are not his friends. In this situation, George Eliot achieves a multi-dimensional picture: the reader and the author know more about the situation than Mr. Brooke does. It is an example, too, of things not being what they seem to be to the character involved. The crowd is made up of weavers and tanners who "had never thought of Mr. Brooke as a neighbour." The crowd is depicted in animal imagery: "bellowings," "struggling," "brayings." Mr. Brooke does not comprehend the situation. The crowd does. He emerges not as a humorous character but rather a tragic one. In the private world of Mr. Brooke, the abortive political confrontation is a tragic fall. As George Eliot depicts him, one doubts that he comprehends it as such, though he is aware that his experience is some sort of fiasco.

CHAPTER IV
FOUR OTHER SCENES

In Chapter 53, where Nicholas Bulstrode is confronted by John Raffles, we see again the interrelationships at work in Middlemarch. I have already revealed in my discussion of Featherstone's death the relationship between Featherstone's illegitimate son, Joshua Rigg, and Raffles, and that Featherstone's death, therefore, brings Raffles to Middlemarch. We are to learn in this new confrontation just how extensive Raffles' ties are with Bulstrode and other characters, especially with Ladislav. Raffles is symbolic of the tortured conscience and fear of discovery which Bulstrode is trying to escape. This scene expands upon the greed in Bulstrode's background. It reveals that he has been married previously to Ladislav's grandmother and has kept a rightful inheritance from Ladislav and his harassed mother. We are to learn later that Ladislav's grandmother and Casaubon's mother were sisters.

One of the important scenes upon which this confrontation between Bulstrode and Raffles builds occurs in Chapter 41 where Raffles first visits Middlemarch to see his stepson, Rigg, new master of Stone Court. There, quite by accident, he comes into possession of a letter from Bulstrode to Rigg, expressing Bulstrode's desire to purchase Stone Court. Raffles

has not known Bulstrode's whereabouts until he finds that letter. The triviality of a letter changes the course of the great characters of Middlemarch from that point forward. George Eliot constantly demonstrates that the chain of ordinary events shackles people's lives. It was ironic that Raffles visited Middlemarch, and the letter suggests another irony and perhaps a myth as well.

We see in the encounter between Bulstrode and Raffles that Bulstrode's dream is to acquire Stone Court as a place from which he can work more "on the side of Gospel truth," a place of "Providence." Indeed, Featherstone ironically had expected that if Rigg got Stone Court he would cling to it "as the Garden of Eden." Now, in Bulstrode's outreaching for the Garden of Eden, he inherits Raffles, portrayed as a devil-figure. Bulstrode is a Faustus. He is infested with the devil, and the novelist allows Raffles to play on Bulstrode's first name, with repeated references to "Nick."

Let us examine some of the imagery George Eliot uses in painting Raffles as a devil of torment. He is first described in the scene as a "fellow in black coming along the lane." His first words might suggest the eternal conflict of God with the Devil: "By Jove, Nick..." The letter which Bulstrode regards as a communication for securing Providence is described by Raffles as "a providential thing" for him instead. There

is irony in the fact that Bulstrode's "Providence" becomes a hell instead. The devil has won a skirmish. George Eliot enlarges the image. Bulstrode observes that "as if by some hideous magic, this loud red figure has risen before him in unmanageable solidity-- an incorporate past which had not entered into his imagination of chastisements." Raffles enjoys tormenting Bulstrode; "You don't like being called Nick," he banters. "Some said you had a handsome family likeness to old Nick." The novelist observes that Bulstrode has not yet learned that "even the desire for cognac was not stronger in Raffles than the desire to torment..."

The novelist uses vivid description to intensify the portrayal of the devilish nature of Raffles; "swaggering," "sneering," "mocking." Bulstrode finds himself playing a game with the devil because of his past. Of Raffles' cunning, the novelist observes, there is "an evident selection of statements, as if they had been so many moves at chess." With the upper hand, Raffles reveals fully his Satanic nature: "his lips curled with a smile and then opened with a short, triumphant laugh."

Throughout the scene, Bulstrode represents understatement, stasis; and Raffles, exaggeration, movement. Bulstrode reacts to Raffles with a "cold" handshake, and "chill anger." He listens while Raffles, animated with excitement, swaggers,

whistles, swings his leg, and loads his conversation with verbs of action. For example, he tells Bulstrode about money he expects: "No, I'll wait here until you bring it. I'll take a stroll and have a snack and you'll be back by that time." At breakfast with Raffles the next morning, Bulstrode can "hardly do more than sip his tea and break his toast." Raffles is animated as ever. He winks, pushes his chair, rises and stalks about.

These scenes are intensified by the action and inaction of George Eliot's characters, even by their active and passive conversation. In this confrontation, we can clearly see the ego motive in action. Bulstrode had rationalized away his sins before Raffles came and, "his struggles had been securely private." Raffles shatters the egoistic security of Bulstrode's reputation. Bulstrode's "egoistic terrors" are revealed, and he contemplates the horror of "disgrace in the presence of his neighbors and of his own wife." What truly makes Bulstrode a tragic character is that he wants to be good and fails. As the novelist says, "To men who aim only at escaping felony, nothing short of the prisoner's dock is disgrace. But Mr. Bulstrode had aimed at being an eminent Christian."

The dramatic power with which the novelist portrays this man in his suffering compels us to pity him as a tragic figure. Again and again she achieves the aim of

her art to make us feel pity for struggling human beings. It may be true that George Eliot seeks in Middlemarch to give moral status to her own life, with its illicit love. If the fallen creatures of Middlemarch deserve tolerance and pity, perhaps forgiveness, then may she not, also? One feels that she is ultimately asking the question of humanity: what judgment shall be made on your own secret weaknesses? It is a powerful argument.

* * *

Surely, one of the greatest scenes of confrontation in English literature is that in Chapter 74 where Bulstrode in disgrace faces his loyal wife. Harriet Bulstrode is one of the few people in Middlemarch who have not yet learned of the scandal which Raffles has revealed. George Eliot has built to this climactic moment in Bulstrode's life, scene by scene, incident by incident, as she did with Dorothea and Casaubon. We know from previous scenes how many lives are affected in Middlemarch by the events leading up to this confrontation. The lives of all the leading characters are, by this time, vitally entwined. The thread of Bulstrode's ego has been traced through the novel, and now in confrontation with his wife, his pride faces its greatest test. Raffles is dead, and Bulstrode and Lydgate, who attended Raffles in his sickness, are being blamed. Therefore, in his fall, Bulstrode is bringing down Lydgate with

him. Already the community has ostracized them--and Harriet Bulstrode, too, though she is slow to realize it. In the scandal, Harriet, about whom we have known little really, before this confrontation, emerges rapidly as a very tragic figure. Perhaps the primary concept the reader carries with him to this confrontation is that Harriet is a woman of good family and of great integrity and propriety, and to whom any scandal in her family would seem catastrophic.

In the previous scenes, we have observed how selfishness overpowers Harriet's husband's better motives. At the death of Raffles preceding the confrontation between Bulstrode and Harriet, the novelist observes of Bulstrode that there is a "strange, piteous conflict in the soul of this unhappy man, who had longed for years to be better than he was..." (p. 517). In that scene, when he gives the housekeeper the key to the wine-cooler to allow her to provide Raffles with brandy against Lydgate's directions, Bulstrode thinks that Raffles' death will free him from danger of scandal. But, as in other death scenes we have encountered in the novel, irony prevails. At the time of his death, Raffles had already revealed Bulstrode's secret to people in Middlemarch.

Even in death, Raffles retains a grip on Bulstrode's life. Bulstrode's act, which he expected to result in a new life, results, instead, in his downfall. It is another example in the novel of Aristotelian peripety. Bulstrode, anticipating downfall, had tried to propitiate the gods. He had tried to make restitution to Ladislav for denying him his inheritance. Bulstrode made this offer, George Eliot says, because "It was really before his God that Bulstrode was about to attempt such restitution as seemed possible." But, as we know, the attempt failed. The classical theme of Greek tragedy and, indeed, of original sin and the fall of man in the Garden of Eden appears in the tragedy of Bulstrode facing his wife. The theme is that pride brings defeat.³⁷

There is behind the chapter on the confrontation of Bulstrode and his wife a chorus of noisy gossipers against which the intensely effective, quiet understatement of the two tragic figures contrasts sharply. The community realizes that Mrs. Bulstrode does not know of her husband's scandalous past, and there is an ironic "busy benevolences anxious to ascertain what it would be well for her to feel under the circumstances." The gossipers are used as a device to intensify the suspense as the confrontation between Bulstrode and his wife be-

comes imminent. The gossipers function antiphonally as a chorus of evil, contrasting with the goodness which Harriet represents. George Eliot displays her power of psychological penetration here, developing the gossipers, revealing their view that Harriet needs to suffer for her own good. This is a revelation of the psychology of the pack, crying for a blood sacrifice. The gossipers assume the role of a chanting Dionysian chorus in Greek drama. There is envy of Harriet's goodness, of her superiority to them, and they clamor for her downfall. This is as close as George Eliot comes in Middlemarch to fitting the description of cynicism which some critics charge to her.

One of the gossipers, Mrs. Hackbutt, says of Harriet, "We shall see what she will do." Our pity for Harriet grows as we see that she senses something is wrong. She first wants to know what it is, then does not want to know at all, fearing something very dreadful involving her husband. Her conflicting desires effect a kind of counterpoint in human agony. As she searches for the truth, tragic motifs appear. She tells Mrs. Hackbutt, "I never saw a town I should like to live at better, and, especially our end." The chapter intensifies our view of Harriet as a good woman. The words tumble out: "honest," "not an

object of dislike," "never consciously hurt anybody," "wishes to do right," "goodhearted," and so forth. The great flurry of movement as the gossipers gather to discuss the Bulstrodes and as Harriet travels about town seeking, then fleeing, from the truth is used to increase the drama of the moment. The impact of the truth comes to her not from Bulstrode but from her brother, Walter Vincy. Before this moment, we look at Harriet in the chapter from the viewpoint of the novelist, from the viewpoints of her neighbors, from her own point of view and from ours, as readers.

Again we see the dramatic impact which comes from the fact that the principal character of the moment does not know as much as we do about the tragedy in which she is involved. The neighbors wait and the reader waits "to see what she will do." The novelist relates, "That the moment was perhaps worse than any which came after it. It contained that concentrated experience which in great crises of emotion reveals the bias of a nature, and is prophetic of the ultimate act which will end an intermediate struggle... under the working of terror came the image of her husband exposed to disgrace-- and then after an instant of scorching shame in which she felt only the eyes of the world, with one leap of her heart she was at his side in mournful but

unreproaching fellowship with shame and isolation." It is a great test of their twenty years of marriage.

Harriet's reaction to the news is expressed in eloquent understatement. She says to her brother, "Give me your arm to the carriage, Walter, I feel very weak." That is all. Nothing more. At home that evening, the moment of confronting her husband arrives. The novelist develops here a theme of sin and penitence. Harriet removes her ornaments and puts on a plain black gown. She puts on a plain bonnet "which made her look suddenly like an early Methodist." Then she descends the stairs to Bulstrode's room. That she makes a descent symbolizes that Bulstrode's sin has pulled her down. There is symbolism, too, in the fact that the confrontation is at night. The imagery of the confrontation depicts Bulstrode as a fallen man. Harriet comes to him in the darkness and finds him with "eyes bent down," "withered," "small," and "shrunken." Her simple actions generate great drama. She touches his hand which rests on the chair arm and places her other hand on his shoulder. In this intense moment, there is only one line of dialogue. "Look up, Nicholas," she says. And two crushed lives meld anew to face the world. He weeps. They weep together. "His confession was silent, and her promise of faithfulness was silent."

* * *

I have chosen to examine the scene in which Will Ladislaw confronts Rosamond after Dorothea has surprised them together, misinterpreted the intimate scene and left in a fit of jealous anger.

There are many earlier scenes in the novel upon which the drama of this confrontation is built. We know that Ladislaw has loved Dorothea since their encounter on her honeymoon trip to Rome with Casaubon. We know from previous encounters that Rosamond is a coquette who dotes on Ladislaw's attentions. Drama must result when Dorothea surprises them in what appears to be a moment of intimacy. This occurs just after a scene in which Ladislaw finally had been able to convey the welcome message to Dorothea that he loves her. The interrelations of Ladislaw and Rosamond with the other characters in Middlemarch, many of which we have already discussed here, also underlie the confrontation between Ladislaw and Rosamond. Rosamond, whose vanity was ruffled when she realized Ladislaw loved Dorothea, has already revealed to him with pleasure that Casaubon provided in his will for Dorothea to lose any inheritance if she marries Ladislaw. Before the new confrontation with Rosamond, Ladislaw has learned from Raffles and Bulstrode of his ties with them from the past, including the fact that Bulstrode was married first to Casaubon's aunt, the grandmother of Ladislaw. We

have seen already how the other connections of Ladislav and Rosamond reach through Middlemarch families. What affects their lives must directly affect the lives of many other people in Middlemarch, and conversely. Again, it is George Eliot's concept of the "gradual action of ordinary causes." As Rosamond confronts Ladislav after Dorothea's angry departure, the reader knows there already have been scenes in which Rosamond has learned first of Lydgate's financial problems, and finally of his disgrace. The irony is that she had married Lydgate to climb the social ladder. She reaps social disgrace instead. Because of this irony, the reader knows, she has sought Ladislav's attentions increasingly to feed her damaged pride. The scenes which reveal this situation to the reader set the stage for the confrontation in which this woman with wounded vanity faces Ladislav, who is enraged because her vanity has compromised him with Dorothea.

There is in the confrontation between Ladislav and Rosamond a great deal of animal imagery. First, there is Ladislav's uncontrolled, beastly rage on the one hand, and the motionless, dread quiet of the jungle-- Rosamond's mute, offended ego-- on the other. Ladislav is depicted as "a panther with a javelin-wound." Other descriptions are applied to heighten the animal image: "springing," "biting,"

moving with "the restlessness of a wild animal that sees prey," "looking fiercely" and so forth. Rosamond is portrayed by George Eliot as cold and withdrawn, contrasting with Ladislav who is caught up in the heat of temper and animation. The novelist says of Rosamond, "Her little hands which she folded before her were very cold." Her voice "in flute-like tones of sarcasm" reflect her icy attitude. "She felt a new terrified recoil" from Ladislav's blistering verbal attack.

It should be observed also that to this dread quiet image of Rosamond is fused the imagery of her words, "as if they were reptiles." Thus she appears as a second Eve or as the snake in the Garden of Eden. In an earlier scene between Rosamond and Lydgate (p. 222), there is a reptilian image in the description of Rosamond's "fair long neck which he had been used to see turning about under the most perfect management of self-contented grace."

One finds George Eliot's irony again in the confrontation between Ladislav and Rosamond. Ladislav observes that "having come back to this hearth" where he had "enjoyed a caressing friendship," he had found "calamity seated there." It is also an example of peripety. Ladislav wants sympathy in visits to Rosamond's home but encounters misfortune instead. In discussing the movement and stasis of this scene, one becomes aware that these devices are often employed by

George Eliot in a dual capacity. In the first half of the scene, there is assigned to Ladislav action and to Rosamond, that of stasis, or non-action. There is assigned to both of them in the second half of the scene the imagery of diminished or non-action. The effect in the first half is to contrast the violence of Ladislav's brute emotionalism with Rosamond's contained, proper manner. The effect of the quietude, the understatement of the second half of the scene is to contrast it with the first half, suggesting perhaps that reason once again has assumed supremacy over emotion.

This scene is a study in movement and non-movement. It is imagery that intensifies the drama. Quiet Rosamond lays the tips of her fingers affectionately on Ladislav's coat-sleeve. He darts, wheels and stands. She sits down. We see him "darting from her." He feels there is a need for "springing and biting..." He "wheels," and begins "to move about..." She speaks coolly. He finds vent for his wrath by "snatching up" her words. In the second half of the scene, Rosamond sits "perfectly still." The description of movements of Ladislav, now constricted by returning reason, are proof of George Eliot's fine sense of dramatic development. He "took up his hat, yet stood some moments irresolute." He faces the moment of leaving without further speech, but he "shrank from it as a brutality." In

this moment, there is a constriction in his speech and actions. "He felt checked and stultified in his anger." The reader notes his compressed actions: "He walked toward the mantelpiece and leaned his arm on it, and waited in silence for-- he hardly knew what... And so they remained for many minutes opposite each other, far apart, in silence."

We already know that pride looms large in this scene. Rosamond is consumed by her egotism throughout the book. She never escapes it. The novelist tells us Rosamond "had little been used to imagining other people's states of mind except as a material cut into shape by her own wishes." Rosamond herself reveals her pride to us in what she says, as well as in what she does. "You can easily go after Mrs. Casaubon and explain your preference," she tells Ladislav with sarcasm. Her wounded vanity is scarcely veiled in the comment. Ladislav shows his contempt for her egotism, lashing back, "Explain my preference! I never had a preference for her, any more than I have a preference for breathing." The dialogue is brilliant. This brilliance is further shown in the novelist's psychological assessment of the turmoil Rosamond experiences as she is battered down. Rosamond, says George Eliot, "was almost losing her sense of identity, and seemed to be waking into some new terrible experience... all her sensibility was turned into a bewildering novelty of pain... what another nature felt in opposition to her

own was being burnt and bitten into her consciousness." After such turmoil, the scene closes with great understatement in a single exchange of dialogue. "Shall I come in and see Lydgate this evening?" asks Ladislav. "If you like," Rosamond answers just audibly.

George Eliot's philosophic tolerance is extended to Rosamond, despite Rosamond's shortcomings, in fact, perhaps because of them, and the reader feels this, too. Part of the drama which surrounds Rosamond grows out of the fact that we understand her problem of pride and that she does not. We can see that because she does not understand this problem, she suffers more terribly, grappling with a monster invisible to her, though we see it. Her problem with egocentricity contrasts with that of Bulstrode and Casaubon, who know what the monster is, though they can not overpower it.

* * *

Not all of George Eliot's confrontation scenes involve two or more people. In Chapter 80, we see Dorothea in confrontation with herself. Of course, there are many scenes which have led up to this confrontation of self, some of which we have already examined. Among the most important previous scenes are Dorothea's discovery on her honeymoon in Rome that Casaubon is doomed to failure, the scene just prior to Casaubon's death and his death scene itself, followed

by the scenes with Ladislav when he revealed his love for Dorothea, and finally the intimate scene in which she misconstrued Ladislav's intentions with Rosamond. The interrelationships Dorothea has with others in Middlemarch already have been amply revealed. We have seen how her life and others' lives affect one another. Now in this critical self-confrontation, coming immediately after her departure in jealous rage from Rosamond's house where she found Rosamond and Ladislav together, Dorothea experiences a kind of catharsis.

It may seem strange that I have chosen this scene to illustrate George Eliot's dramatic power, since it seems we must hear Dorothea speak mostly through interior monologue, except for the final moments of dialogue with her maid, Tantripp. My reason for choosing this scene is to show the novelist's mastery of dramatic action where there is minimal dialogue. George Eliot shows us that a self-confrontation does not preclude dramatic action and that she can achieve great dramatic power in such a scene. Irony is exhibited in the fact that in this scene, Dorothea suffers from the same torment that Rosamond suffered in her most profound encounter with Ladislav: pride. But there are different dramatic values involved because the two women cope with their wounded vanity differently.

After Ladislav left Rosamond, she had been faint and ill, and taken with hysterical crying, but Lydgate came to

help her through the crisis. The same portrayal of illness is used with Dorothea, but she must face her crisis alone. Her self-confrontation is more active, more dramatic, than that of Rosamond. In the sanctuary of her room, Dorothea is depicted as in the "clutch of inescapable anguish," with "faint words," moaning: "Oh, I did love him!" Her "loud whispers" in crying leave room to assume that what appears to be interior monologue may have actually been spoken aloud.³⁸ There follows a theme of grief: "suffering," "sobs," "lost belief," "hardness," "coldness," "aching," "weariness," "anguish," and so on.

There is a more profound theme, however, on the sin of pride and of allied atonement, death and resurrection. Let us look closely. George Eliot tells us that Dorothea is ill and suffering because of "her lost woman's pride," her "jealous offended pride." Biblical depiction follows: "two images-- two living forms that tore her heart in two, as if it had been the heart of a mother who sees her child divided by the sword..." To gain relief, for atonement, Dorothea "lay on the bare floor and let the night grow cold around her." We see that her conflict with pride takes place at night. A death theme arises: the flames of her anger gradually die and she is in "the dim vault where she sat as

the bride of a worn-out life." On the cold floor, she sobs herself to sleep.

Then comes the resurrection, the rebirth, the new life, symbolized by "the morning twilight." She awakens "with the clearest conscience" and wraps life-giving "warm things" around her. She is "vigorous" for "she had awakened to a new condition: She felt as if her soul had been liberated from its terrible conflict." The novelist allows Dorothea then to unburden herself through interior monologue. "She began now to live through that yesterday morning deliberately again..." She re-evaluates her conduct with Rosamond and Ladislaw. She realizes that in her "jealous indignation and disgust, when quitting the hateful room, she had flung away all the mercy with which she had undertaken that visit." The "dominant spirit of justice" in her reasserts itself, and she vows to go again to Rosamond and tell her of Lydgate's loyal affection. We see the theme of death and transfiguration achieved when Dorothea tosses aside her mourning clothes and tells Tantripp to bring new clothes because "... Fresh garments belong to all initiation." She is alive again.

There are other religious images. Outside her window in the "pearly light" she sees some figures--"perhaps the shepherd and his dog." Tantripp speaks, telling Dorothea she

looks like "an angel." Dorothea's atonement is renunciation, central to her character throughout the novel, and central in the philosophy of George Eliot. In the Westminster Review in 1855, the novelist writes: "It is the very perception that the thing we renounce is precious, is something never to be compensated to us, which constitutes the beauty and heroism of renunciation." (Biography, p. 182). Soon this Saint Theresa is on her way to "see and save Rosamond."

From the reader's point of view, perhaps, Dorothea's attempts at self-renunciation appear as a delusion. She acts quixotically.³⁹ She can never really change Rosamond, though in a subsequent scene she does help Rosamond get a faint glimpse of the world beyond herself. Rosamond retreats quickly to her ego-centered universe. Because Dorothea is quixotic, she ironically has something in common with Bulstrode, though he is consummate in evil: They both want to be more, idealistically, than they are. Dorothea, of course, comes close to achieving this goal. Bulstrode never gains the goal at all.

A final comment on the action in Dorothea's self-confrontation has been left for the last because it deserves special emphasis. The scene, essentially involving one person, is charged with action. It demonstrates George Eliot's

sure dramatic hand. Verbs of action run all through the scene. Dorothea dismisses Tantripp, locks her door, turns away, presses her hands to her head and moans aloud. She sobs, shakes, cries in loud whispers, lies on the floor, rises, wraps and seats herself, opens her curtains, looks out, takes off her clothes, makes her toilet, rings for Tantripp and issues orders. Other verbs of action abound. Into this scene, George Eliot breathes life with her dramatic power, exploring human conflict.

* * *

There are, of course, other great scenes before and after this one. In each of them, most of the same devices that we have already explored are used. It is significant that the great confrontations in Middlemarch are sometimes very brief scenes. They are never very long. One thinks of the intensity of the little scene in which Farebrother, the priest, speaks to Mary Garth in behalf of Fred Vincy's love when Farebrother longs to speak for himself. One thinks also of the painful little scenes, filled with drama, in which Mr. Brooke, the shallow clown, tries to perform a role as guardian for Dorothea, faltering, perhaps unaware of his inadequacies, yet perhaps not altogether unaware. There is the climactic love scene in which Ladislav and Dorothea are joined together at last. Because it is the crescendo of the novel, George Eliot may have initially felt that it was the

greatest scene. If so, one suspects that in later evaluation, she saw that it was not. It lacks that critical understatement which makes some of the other scenes superior to it. The eight scenes examined in this thesis were chosen not only because the very best scenes in the book are among them but also because they provide a wide representation of what George Eliot was able to do in major scenes. The order of presentation of the scenes here is purely a matter of consecutive development from the beginning to the end of the novel.

CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

We have considered here the question of what makes Middlemarch a great novel. I have said that, while George Eliot excels in characterization and while her work is well unified, the secret of her great fiction lies not there, but rather in her dramatic power in great scenes of confrontation. The comments of several critics relevant to the question have been detailed here. I have shown that, while these critics accord George Eliot's dramatic powers some significance, none of them adequately pinpoint the confrontations as the central source of her greatness; nor do they explicate these scenes to give proper emphasis to her dramatic power. It must be understood that the confrontation scenes are the necessary literary arenas for George Eliot's dramatic power to reveal its brilliance. Ultimately, perhaps, what produces George Eliot's great fiction is her sure knowledge of the kinds of characters who will produce drama in confrontations and of the kinds of circumstances they must encounter to achieve this. It appears that she developed from her knowledge of people in real life an educated instinct for characters and events which produce great drama.

Examining her own comments, I have shown that George Eliot believes dramatic power to be the most important of all factors in fiction. We have seen that she sought to achieve that power in confrontations and that she undoubtedly drew upon experiences from personal encounters in life in writing these great scenes. My examination of her own confrontations has been done against a background of descriptions of the kind of person George Eliot was: her motives, her internal conflicts, her psychological make-up. The purpose of this was to reveal through what sort of spectrum we must view George Eliot's moments of truth in her own life and, consequently, what her fiction may be expected to reflect. We have seen that she was a highly intelligent, shy, sensitive person for whom ordinary lives and events would reverberate with intense meaning. I have shown that the guiding philosophy underlying her fiction is humanistic, that a novelist must give primary attention to the trials, the struggles of the masses in their earthly existence, and that the novelist's function is to create tolerance for their weaknesses and pity for their plight. Her ultimate goal, as I have shown, is to broaden the moral sympathies of her readers. I have taken the position that George Eliot is a great psychological and philosophical novelist and that

this is revealed most forcefully in the great confrontation scenes of Middlemarch.

Against the background of critical opinions and George Eliot's personal life, I have shown that she uses a central theme of conflict between egoism and idealism as the conflict at the core of Middlemarch. I have examined eight great scenes to show some of the literary techniques George Eliot uses to achieve her artistic mastery in Middlemarch. Among these devices are the pyramiding of scenes, the building of dramatic tension scene-upon-scene, and the depicting of the effects of gradual action of ordinary causes upon the lives of all the characters through their interrelationships. Other techniques include the intensification of drama through use of irony, peripety, the contrast between movement and stasis of characters, application of the psychological theme of ego conflicts, use of shifting points of view, depicting of tragic figures, and use of philosophical themes and understatement.

What is to be said in conclusion? In these confrontations, George Eliot presents people as no better and no worse than they are. A great strength of the novelist is her insight into the nature of man, her sympathetic understanding of what makes him great and what makes him repugnant, her grasp of the knowledge that little actions bear accumulatively upon one's life, ultimately shaping it

profoundly. We know that the major scenes in Middlemarch grew out of such little actions. George Eliot has a critical awareness that there are many human beings who simply bear tragedy unnoticed and that their "unhistoric acts" for "the growing good of the world" have made things better in some degree for all mankind (p. 613). We have seen already how Beaty shows George Eliot's careful planning in her "Quarry" for Middlemarch of the interrelationships among the characters, as well as lists of big incidents, of "what happens," and of the effects of the actions of the characters upon one another. It is easy to understand, then, why George Eliot is considered a psychological novelist.

But we must also remember that she is a philosophical novelist. She tells us that art has the moral duty to enlarge man's sympathies. She goes a step further in her commentary in the Westminster Review in April, 1856, on Ruskin's Modern Painters. In a discussion of esthetic "finish" in that book, she says, "The essence of an admirable chapter on finish is that all real finish is not mere polish, but added truth. Great artists finish not to show their skill, not to produce a smooth piece of work, but to render clearer the expression of knowledge."⁴⁰ In her discussion on realism in the Westminster Review in July, 1856, she says that in art, "We want to be taught to feel, not for the heroic artisan or

the sentimental peasant, but for the peasant in all his coarse apathy, and the artisan in all his suspicious selfishness." She also writes in that same article, "A picture of human life such as a great artist can give surprises even the trivial and the selfish into that attention to what is apart from themselves which may be called the raw material of moral sentiment."⁴¹

It is reasonable to conclude that the two most important literary devices at work in the major confrontation scenes are George Eliot's psychological and philosophical perspectives. All the other literary devices employed relate to these two perspectives. The dominate force at work is philosophy, because her psychological perspective on man derives from her assessment of what man is, in relationship to his world, and what he wants to be-- most often in her fiction, as in real life, two very distinct, different things.

Many critics contemporary with George Eliot expressed the view that Middlemarch depicts a defeatist and even deterministic philosophy.⁴² It is charged by some critics, and it is largely true, that the principal characters of Middlemarch end as failures. Indeed, their basic vices never change, though in some major confrontations they rise above themselves, as Bulstrode, Rosamond and even Featherstone do. But they never really overcome their flaws. Dorothea remains the frustrated idealist. Bulstrode can

never quite fully confess all his sins, even to his wife. Lydgate allows personal compromise to destroy him. Poor Mr. Brooke goes on babbling, stumbling and puzzling over Middlemarch's reaction to him. And so we could go through most of the list of characters.

Are, then, the splendid confrontation scenes in Middlemarch only offering despair for humanity? Are the critics right who have charged that George Eliot is deterministic, even cynical, and that she is saying there is no hope for mankind? On the contrary, Middlemarch conveys hope, but for a realistic world in which all people are flawed. George Eliot does not suggest that the confrontations change her characters basically. The scenes simply reveal most vividly who and what the characters are. The hope to be derived from the book, first of all, comes from her insistence that in the worst of the characters, some profound good, some flickers of nobility, show through. If there is a deterministic theme to her work, it does not prevent the characters from making individual decisions that result in good for others. But the real hope conveyed by the book is, I suspect, George Eliot's own hope and, therefore, a personal one. It is not that the confrontations are experiences to inform or improve the characters, but it is the novelist's aim that her readers, as

witnesses to the confrontations, may broaden their own moral sympathies. All great literature achieves this; it broadens man's understanding, his compassion for his flawed fellowmen.

George Eliot seeks, as all great writers seek, to devise literary techniques which will make it possible for her to convey most intensely her vision as a novelist. We have seen that she does this, that it is what "one's soul thirsts for..." She uses her dramatic power in the confrontations most effectively. These scenes reveal how the daily words and acts, through the gradual action of ordinary causes, can profoundly affect lives, culminating in such confrontations. But, says George Eliot, humanity usually is unaware of the implications of common occurrences. She writes: "That element of tragedy which lies in the very fact of frequency, has not yet wrought itself into the coarse emotion of mankind; and perhaps our frames could hardly bear much of it. If we had a keen vision and a feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence. As it is, the quickest of us walk about well wadded with stupidity" (p. 144). And that is the heart of the matter.

FOOTNOTES

¹Collections of criticism especially drawn upon for this thesis include John Holmstrom and Laurence Lerner, eds., George Eliot and Her Readers, A Selection of Contemporary Reviews (New York, 1966); Gordon S. Haight, ed., A Century of George Eliot Criticism (Boston, 1965); Barbara Hardy, ed., Middlemarch, Critical Approaches to the Novel, (New York, 1967); Richard Stang, ed., Discussions of George Eliot (Boston, 1960); Richard Stang, The Theory of the Novel in England, 1850-1870 (New York, 1959); and Jerome Beaty, Middlemarch from Notebook to Novel, A Study of George Eliot's Creative Method (Urbana, 1960).

²Haight, p. 81. James says Middlemarch is "a treasure trove of details, but an indifferent whole." On the matter of four or five stories, see also Mark Schorer's comments, Hardy, p. 12. Haight's collection of criticisms will be cited hereafter as Criticism.

³Hardy, p. 12. Schorer says here that "the novel creates a powerful effect of unity." Note also Hardy, p. 22, for comment on how George Eliot's "literary operation" is achieved through integration.

⁴George Eliot, Middlemarch, ed. Gordon S. Haight (Boston, 1956), Introduction, p. xv.

⁵Beaty, p. 75.

⁶Hardy, Introduction, pp. 6-7.

⁷Hardy, pp. 119-120. Hilda M. Hulme's excellent commentary on "Language of the Novel" contains some interesting comments on the relevance of Spinoza's Ethics and self-knowledge to Middlemarch.

⁸Partial Portraits (New York, 1905), p. 62.

⁹Note in Criticism the comments on the use of ego motives in George Eliot's fiction and her role as a psychological novelist, in essays by Edith Simcox, p. 74; W. C. Brownell, p. 171; Oliver Elton, p. 197; V. S. Pritchett, p. 211; and George Levine, p. 351-352.

¹⁰Hardy, p. 15.

¹¹Holmstrom and Lerner, p. 102.

¹²Criticism, p. 167.

¹³Ibid, p. 213.

¹⁴Beaty, pp. 77-78.

¹⁵Stang, Discussions of George Eliot, p. 86.

¹⁶See Holmstrom and Lerner, p. 93. Edith Simcox (H. Lawrenny) points out that characters in real life seem "less real and life-like than in the book." There is an interesting parallel commentary on writing fiction to seem realer than real found in George Plimpton's "An Interview with Ernest Hemingway," Hemingway and His Critics. An International Anthology, ed. Carlos Baker (New York, 1961) p. 37. Hemingway says here that fiction must not be "a representation but a whole new thing truer than anything true and alive..."

¹⁷As we shall see, George Eliot was well versed in Aristotle's Poetics and in Greek drama.

¹⁸Holmstrom and Lerner, p. 121.

¹⁹Stang, The Theory of the Novel in England, p. 41.

²⁰All references in this paragraph are to Westminster Review, American edition, LXV, p. 347.

²¹LXV, pp. 30-31.

²²Gordon S. Haight, George Eliot: A Biography (New York, 1968), p. 212. Unless indicated otherwise, all subsequent references to this book will be in parenthesis in the text, with page number only. In subsequent footnotes, the book will be cited as Biography.

²³The George Eliot Letters, ed. Gordon S. Haight (New Haven, Conn., 1954), IV, p. 195. This book hereafter is cited as Letters. George Eliot notes here that she was reading again Aristotle's Poetics. Since we see in the Poetics that the proper tragic figure is one of high reputation and good fortune, it would appear that George Eliot is taking exception to this deliberately at one point in Middlemarch where she defends the use of low characters. On this point, see Middlemarch, ed. Gordon S. Haight (Boston, 1956), pp. 249-250. See also Biography, p. 221.

²⁴On George Eliot's ugliness, note also in Biography, pp. 10, 90, and 115. Henry James' comment, p. 417, is especially graphic: "To begin with, she is magnificently ugly-- deliciously hideous."

²⁵In Letters, V, p. 29, George Eliot tells Harriet Beecher Stowe about "the discouragement, nay paralyzing despondency in which many days of my writing life have passed." See also pp. 48, 202, 378 in Biography, especially p. 247 where she refers to the "long sad years of youth." For comments on her self-deprecation, see Biography, pp. 113, 133.

²⁶There is a striking parallel here to the great conflict which raged also in the life of her contemporary, Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889). One year before George Eliot began writing Middlemarch, Hopkins, in a great demonstration of self-renunciation before becoming a Jesuit priest, burnt most of his poetry. If George Eliot encountered any of Hopkins' poetry-- in which ego arises repeatedly-- she left no record of it that I can find. Hopkins is not mentioned in the index to Letters.

²⁷Criticism, p. 70.

²⁸This and all subsequent references to Middlemarch are from the text edited by Haight (Boston, 1956). References in my text will be by page number only. To avoid confusion, all subsequent references to Haight's Biography in my text, as well as in footnotes, will be cited as Biography, with the page number.

²⁹Letters, V, p. 71.

³⁰Biography, p. 277. George Eliot is quoted as saying that Chrissey wrote to her during the illness preceding her death, "saying she would love to see me, but fears the excitement."

³¹For other comments which she made about tolerance, see Biography, pp. 332, 412 and 421.

³²Criticism, p. 324.

³³Note Hardy, p. 26. W. J. Harvey discusses how post-war critics attempted to redefine George Eliot's artistic power and to defend her "against the charge of being merely a disguised philosopher." Note also Holmstrom and Lerner, p. 99, and James' comments in Partial Portraits, p. 51, on George Eliot as a philosophical writer. In the former, we can see that the novelist exhibits a philosophy in Middlemarch

"which declares the human family deluded in its higher dreams, dependent upon itself, and bound thereby to a closer if sadder brotherhood." In the latter, James says of George Eliot that the "philosophic door is always open on her stage." For commentaries on George Eliot as a psychological novelist, see comments in essays by Edith Simcox, p. 74; W. C. Brownell, pp. 170-171; V. S. Pritchett, pp. 210-211; and F. R. Lewis, p. 259, in Criticism.

³⁴Emphasis is from Haight.

³⁵One reflects here on the fact recorded in Biography, p. 200, that George Eliot conspicuously left out of her journal any reference to the fact that Spinoza's Ethics, on which she labored so long, was never published. Indeed, the virtual anonymity of Mary Anne Evans' life seems relevant here.

³⁶In his "Introduction" to Middlemarch, p. viii, Haight says, "Beneath the dullest stupidity, she always discerns a human spirit that must be respected."

³⁷Note the reference to the theme of Adam and Eve in Middlemarch, pp. 607-608.

³⁸For a very interesting approach to this matter, see Derek Oldfield's comments on erlebte Rede, Hardy, p. 81-84, which deals with quasi-statements, free indirect style. Attention is also directed to Edward Dowden's comments on George Eliot's "second self," Criticism, p. 64.

³⁹See Middlemarch, p. 559. George Eliot describes Dorothea as quixotic.

⁴⁰LXV, p. 346. Emphasis is George Eliot's.

⁴¹LXVI, p. 30. See also footnote 32.

⁴²In Hardy, p. 145, one finds that the British Quarterly held Middlemarch to have registered the "low-tide mark of spiritual belief among the literary class of the Nineteenth Century..." For other related comments on the subject, see in Holmstrom and Lerner, p. 85, the remarks published by critics in The Standard; p. 79, in The Spectator; and p. 99, The Fortnightly Review.

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